



Radiation and Public Health Project

Joseph J. Mangano, MPH, MBA, Executive Director

P.O. Box 1260, Ocean City NJ 08226

odiejoe@aol.com

www.radiation.org

484-948-7965

Directors Christie Brinkley

Karl Grossman

Lisa Martino-Taylor

Mark Meinberg

Susan Shapiro

April 29, 2026

Contact Joseph Mangano 484-948-7965

INFANT HEALTH WORSENING IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY DIABLO CANYON REACTORS ARE POSSIBLE FACTOR – STUDY

April 29, 2026 – San Luis Obispo County rates of infant deaths, low-weight births, and premature births shifted from below to above the state rate over the last three decades. In addition, the county's rate of newborns requiring ventilation, with low Apgar scores of newborn health, or transferred to another facility exceed the state. The county birth defect rate is 114% above the state (more than double). All data were in a report released today.

The report could not identify a factor explaining the change. Current county rates are below the state for common maternal risk factors for abnormal births (such as maternal obesity, mothers age <20 or >35 years old, mothers receiving WIC/Medicaid, previous Cesarean section, and no/late prenatal care). Smoking in pregnancy is elevated in San Luis Obispo county, but rates are <4%, and not likely to fully explain the decline in newborn outcomes.

The study suggested that ongoing radioactive releases from the two nuclear power reactors at Diablo Canyon in San Luis Obispo County, which began operating in the mid-1980s, may have played a role in the change. Exposures to radioactivity are known to cause greater harm to the fetus and infant than on adults.

“There are no apparent causes explaining the decline in infant health in San Luis Obispo County, and thus, exposure to radioactivity released from Diablo Canyon into local air, food, and water should be considered,” says Joseph Mangano MPH MBA, an epidemiologist and the report's author. Mangano is Executive Director of the Radiation and Public Health Project (RPHHP), a research and education group.

“Over and over again we see data that shows infant mortality rates go up when a nuclear power plant goes online and we see these rates go down when they are decommissioned, says Christie Brinkley. “These facts should not be ignored as children's health is at stake. They are always the first to suffer from the toxicity of low-level radiation,” she adds. Brinkley is a Board member and Vice President of RPHHP.

The report showed San Luis Obispo county infant health worsened for both Caucasians and Hispanics, which account for about 90% of the county's newborns. The report was based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data.

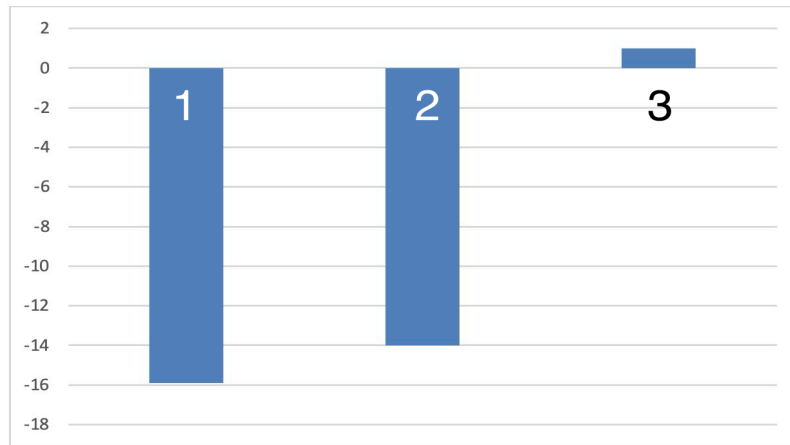
Nuclear reactors like those at Diablo Canyon generate over 100 radioactive chemicals not found in nature but only created in reactors and nuclear weapons explosions. Each of these chemicals can raise risk of cancer, birth defects, and other disorders.

Mangano states that local infant health data should be routinely monitored, adding that any decision on the proposal to allow Diablo Canyon to operate 20 more years should not be made without public discussion on health risk posed by the reactors. RPHP has published 43 scientific journal articles and 8 books on health hazards of radioactive exposures.

The report can be found using the following link:

<https://radiation.org/local-newborn-health-declined-as-california-nuclear-plant-operates/>

Figure 1
% San Luis Obispo County Rate is +/- California Rate
Infant Mortality (Death Rate < 1 Year), by Period



1 = 1968-1984 (before Diablo Canyon startup)
 2 = 1985-2009 (early Diablo Canyon operation)
 3 = 2010-2024 (later Diablo Canyon operation)

Figure 2
Highest and Lowest Birth Defect Rates
Cases per 100,000 Births
30 Largest California Counties, 2016-2024

